GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER TO CREATE SAFER, MORE SECURE SCHOOLS

Task force will develop model school safety and security plan for districts across the Commonwealth

REVERE – Thursday, January 16, 2013 – Governor Deval Patrick today signed Executive Order No. 548 establishing a cross-Secretariat Task Force on School Safety and Security. This task force will be charged with developing a model school safety and security plan that school districts can adapt and implement to ensure that students and educators are safe in the event of an emergency situation. Governor Patrick signed the executive order this morning following a roundtable discussion with parents, educators, public safety and public health officials at the A.C. Whalen Elementary and Susan B. Anthony Middle School complex in Revere.

“No child will be able to succeed academically if they don’t first feel safe in school, and no teacher will be able to teach at their best if they aren’t confident there’s a plan in place to ensure their school is well prepared for an emergency,” said Governor Patrick. “By fostering collaboration among schools, district leadership, public safety and public health officials, community organizations and school building authority officials, we will develop a plan for creating safer school structures, safer school environments and more comprehensive training programs and protocols for response should emergencies happen.”

The Patrick Administration has made historic investments in K-12 education and increased investment in early education so that Massachusetts students are more prepared for success in the classroom than ever before. Today’s announcement continues the Patrick Administration’s efforts to support school districts and students across the Commonwealth by providing the tools schools need to create safe and secure learning environments.

“Schools hold our most precious possessions and the work of this Task Force is vital to making sure school districts have the tools they need to ensure our students and teachers are safe,” said Secretary of Education Matthew Malone. “I look forward to working with this experienced group to create a model plan for safe and secure learning environments across the Commonwealth.”

The Task Force will bring together the expertise of the Executive Office of Education (EOE), the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) and the Executive
Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) along with a diverse group of key stakeholders from the education, public safety and social service sectors to foster collaboration and provide much needed support to school districts across Massachusetts.

School safety and security remains a locally-driven issue. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides guidance and grants for safe and healthy learning environments, and federal guidance on emergency plans to all districts. However, a majority of school districts lack resources needed to do comprehensive safety and security planning on their own and as a result, are under prepared or not at all prepared for emergency situations. To better support these districts, the cross-Secretariat Task Force on School Safety and Security will:

- Develop recommendations for schools around preparing and updating safety plans;
- Develop site assessment protocols and procedures;
- Recommend site safety improvements; and
- Draft school-based training and exercise program recommendations.

The Task Force will be co-chaired by Secretary of Education Matthew Malone, Secretary of Public Safety and Security Andrea Cabral and Secretary of Health and Human Services John Polanowicz. Education representatives include superintendents, teachers, district-level school safety coordinators, representatives from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, representatives from the education agencies, and researchers with expertise on this topic. Public safety representatives include the Director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, or his designee, the Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, or his designee, a representative from the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association, and the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, or his designee. Finally, health and social service representatives include the Assistant Secretary for Children, Youth and Families.

"From the Sandy Hook school shootings in 2012 until now, we’ve witnessed a record number of violent school related incidents in this country," said Secretary of Public Safety and Security Secretary Cabral. "In fact, there was another just Tuesday of this week in New Mexico. Our objective is to prepare our school districts for the worst and our public safety officials for all scenarios through uniform response protocols in an effort to keep our young and vulnerable safe from harm."

"This Task Force is just one of many examples of cross-agency collaborations that will create tangible improvements for our Commonwealth now and for generations to come," said Secretary Polanowicz. "I look forward to our continued discussions of enhancing policies to ensure that students and their schools have the social, public heath, and emergency preparedness resources they need to thrive.

The Task Force will present its findings by the end of the summer in time for the new school year.
“School safety has unfortunately become a pressing issue in recent years, which requires quick, yet thoughtful action,” said Representative Alice Peisch. “Therefore, I am pleased to learn of the creation of a school safety taskforce that will include a diverse representation from all sectors, including education, health and human services and public safety. I applaud the Governor for his commitment to ensuring the complete safety of our students and staff throughout all schools in Massachusetts. I look forward to working collaboratively with the taskforce to create a model school safety plan.”

The Task Force builds on the Patrick Administration’s efforts to help municipalities address school safety and support students, including legislation signed by the Governor in 2010 that changed how schools treat bullying to better ensure student safety. For more information on security planning grants and resources provided by DESE, please see http://www.doe.mass.edu/ssce/safety.html.

To view the Executive Order, please see http://www.mass.gov/governor/legislationexecorder/executiveorder/executive-order-no-548.html.

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